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ABSTRACT

Long considered by its community and the Richmond County Schools' district administration "the worst middle school in the district," the school (unnamed in the study) began a process of change in spring 1987. The instructional staff embraced a schoolwide staff development program designed to help both student achievement and school climate. Implemented was Homan's conceptual framework for the study of human groups including, in particular, the idea that small groups exist and evolve in an environment divided by three distinct levels (physical, technical, and social) and two basic management systems (external and internal). The implementation plan employed the establishment of study groups (collegial teams) that enabled the ongoing study of instructional practices and strategies and helped to institutionalize the practice of peer coaching. At the end of the implementation year, significant changes were reported: (1) promotion based on merit increased among students; (2) the number of retained students was reduced; and (3) attitudes of both the groups and students became more positive. School improvement was achieved through collegial commitment and collaborative decision-making. (7 references) (SI)

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THE SOCIAL BATTLEGROUND OF SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT: WHEN A TROUBLED SCHOOL IS

IMPACTED BY AN INTENSIVE RENEWAL PROGRAM

by

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Long considered by its community and the district's administration to be the worst middle school in the district, the school was beginning a period of major transition. A process of change began in the spring of 1987, when in response to a school system survey, the instructional staff indicated that they would be willing to commit themselves as active participants for a minimum of two years to the training for and the implementing of a staff development project which came to be known locally as the "Models of Teaching Program" (Murphy, Murphy, Joyce, & Showers, 1988). The instructional staff's decision to embrace a school-wide staff development program designed to impact both student achievement and school climate set into motion changes which would alter the social structure of the workplace and the culture of the school.

During the summer of 1987, two consultants trained all returning faculty and administrators to use several instructional models for which the potential for positive impact on student learning was supported by research. An

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implementation plan was developed and put into action at the beginning of the 1987-1988 academic year. The consultants extended their commitment to the project beyond the initial training phase and agreed to provide on-going training and support for a period of three years (Murphy, Murphy, Joyce, & Showers, 1988).

My nine-year association with the school, both as a teacher and an administrator, provided not only a working knowledge of the school's history and a clear understanding of the social structure within the environment but also the opportunity to observe the transition as a participant who was privy to and shared in the day-to-day processes, successes, and frustrations associated with the efforts to change the school. During the course of the initial implementation year, I observed the faculty (hereafter referred to as the group) and the process of change using Homans's conceptual framework for the study of human groups (Homans, 1950).

According to Homans's conceptual framework, small groups exist and evolve in an environment which "may be broken down into three main aspects: physical, technical, and social". Within this environment, two counterbalancing systems govern the social system of a group. The external system is characterized by the "elements of group behavior: sentiment, activity, and interaction, and we say that the external system is the state of the elements and of their interrelations...The external system, plus...the internal system, make up the total social system" (Homans, 1950). As defined by Homans, "the internal system... [is] the elaboration of group behavior that simultaneously arises out of the external system and reacts upon it... [Homans calls] the system 'internal' because it is not directly conditioned by the environment, and ...[speaks] of it as an 'elaboration' because it includes forms of behavior not included under ... the external system" (Homans, 1950). Following

Homans's hypothesis that the interaction of the external system and the internal system react upon and change the environment, the change process was observed in the group in relation to two elements of social behavior (sentiment and interaction) and to the normative changes within the group during the implementation phase of the school improvement program (the treatment).

While Homans's framework includes a third element of social behavior (i.e., activity), I have concentrated on the relationship of interaction to the emergence of sentiment and have dealt tangentially with activity as an expression of sentiment. Although I have "...conceptually isolated interaction and sentiment in order to investigate the relationship between the two, ... in real social behavior interaction and sentiment cannot be isolated from the third element, activity..." (Homans, 1950). As Homans stated, "If the frequency of interaction between two or more persons increases, the degree of their liking for one another will increase...." and "...persons who feel sentiments of liking for one another will express those sentiments in activities.... and these activities may further strengthen the sentiments of liking" (Homans, 1950).

Pre-treatment Condition and Environment

The School and Community

Having opened in 1969 as a junior high school serving students in grades seven, eight, and nine, the school became a middle school with grades six, seven, and eight in 1979. The historically negative public view of the quality of the school reflected the fact that it was plagued by many of the serious, long-term, concurrent problems frequently found in inner-city schools

and that the society tends to write off such schools -- and their students -- as hopeless.

The school was geographically located in a lower socioeconomic community which was bordered by numerous industrial/commercial concerns. Portions of the community, especially the lower-income housing projects, had for some time been experiencing an increasing crime rate, much of which was purportedly drug-related. The streets of the projects were often filled late into the night with school-aged children. Many of the project buildings had barred or boarded windows and littered yards. A chemical plant less than a mile from the school daily filled the air with plumes of white smoke. Nearby vacant lots were overgrown or had been converted to graveyards for wrecked automobiles. The nearby high school dismissed classes one and one-half hour earlier than the middle school, and high school students frequently terrorized the younger students, some of whom knew only one route to travel, as they walked home. Many of the female students had to travel a route bordering a wooded area where there had been several incidents of men exposing themselves to students who were going to or from school.

Community involvement and support was, at best, poor. The PTA was only minimally active and was able to raise, on the average, between \$500 and \$1,000 each year to supplement the instructional monies allocated by the district; most fund-raising was managed via the teachers. Parental attendance at school functions was sparse. Few parents came to conferences requested by teachers unless the conferences were related to disciplinary actions.

Approximately fifty percent of the students resided in low-income housing, and roughly fifty percent lived with one parent or lived with someone other than a parent. In many cases, the mothers were teenagers when their children were born, and the task of rearing the children had been assumed by

grandparents or other relatives. Like their parents and guardians, most of the students had lived in the community since birth. Many of the students had never traveled beyond those areas served by local transit authority routes.

The Student Population

The demographics of the student population had changed little since the school originally opened. Over ninety-five percent of the students were black. Over ninety percent of the students qualified for participation in the federal free lunch program. Many of the students were one or more years older than was considered age-appropriate for their grade placements (In the 1986-1987 school year, the students ranged in age from eleven to seventeen years.). The number of students promoted with exception to the district's established middle school promotion policy combined with the number of students who were retained far exceeded the number of students who were promoted based on merit (e.g., the promotion policy stipulated that in order to be promoted on merit, a student must pass the tests which accompanied the basal reading textbook, demonstrate specified, minimal competency in mathematics, and pass two of the remaining three academic subjects (language arts, science, and social studies)). At the end of the school year preceding this study (1986-1987), only 34% of the students were promoted on merit.

While students' scores on state criterion referenced tests and various standardized tests had improved during recent years, these scores had consistently been lower than the system and state performance averages. For example, the mean S.A.I. (School Ability Index, Otis Lennon School Ability Test) of the student population was 85. Roughly one-half of the students were considered "slow learners" and received some form of compensatory instruction either through Special Education classes, Chapter I programs, system-level

instructional projects/initiatives, or on-site curricular modifications. The students, always acutely aware that they were receiving "extra help," demonstrated low esteem for themselves and their peers, lacked confidence in their academic abilities, and accepted failure as the prevailing norm.

The school consistently recorded a disproportionately high student suspension rate which was a consequence of the administration's continuous use of quasi-legal means (suspension from school) to deal with violations of the school's/district's student code of conduct and the teachers' heavy reliance on administrative intervention with minor infractions (For the student population of 550, the school reported 343 suspensions during the 1986-1987 school year.). Teachers expected the administration to suspend referred students (regardless of the severity of the infraction) and considered an administrator's deciding not to suspend ["Get rid of him (her)."] as failure to support them.

The Instructional Staff -- Teachers and Administrators

None of the instructional staff (43 persons holding state teacher certification) resided in the immediate community where the school was located. Racially, the instructional group was composed of twenty-three blacks and twenty whites. Of the thirty-nine classroom teachers, ten were new to the school, and nine were beginning their second year with the school.

Compared to other schools in the district, the average, annual turnover rate for the faculty had historically been high. At the end of 1986-1987, thirty-three percent of the faculty opted not to return the following year. During the course of the implementation year, three teachers resigned (One teacher's certification expired, one teacher was unable to obtain appropriate

certification, and one teacher accepted a higher-paying position in the private sector.).

The majority of the faculty held teaching certificates required for either elementary or secondary positions, and few held middle grades certification or had received any formal training in the nature and curriculum needs of the middle school learner. Because of their lack of knowledge about the concept of middle school education or their experiences with and/or their training for either the elementary or the secondary levels of education, many of the group did not agree with, understand, or accept the philosophy of the middle school concept as practiced by the district.

The instructional strategies most frequently used by the group were lecture and recitation. The teachers relied heavily on teacher editions of textbooks and workbook activities both for planning and for delivery of lessons. The curriculum was often administered mechanically by the teachers with little attention paid to the individual differences of the students. As a result, the grade distributions reported each marking period (six weeks) indicated excessively high numbers (in some cases as high as 60%) of unsatisfactory and failing grades.

Yet, there existed a "core" group of about fifteen teachers, administrators, and staff who had chosen to remain with the school for five or more years. Although the faculty generally held inappropriately low expectations for student achievement, this "core" group believed that the socioeconomic and environmental factors often credited as the causes of poor academic performance were not insurmountable obstacles and had searched for the means to improve the learning skills of their students.

In spite of their limited success, this "core" group had become convinced that in order to alter the end results of the instructional program, they must

change both the ways they planned and the strategies they used for instruction and that they must change the environment in which they worked and in which their students learned. Their goals of school improvement could not be achieved through administrative edict or with "bandaid" reform. Because of the faculty's general reluctance to welcome externally imposed change with open arms, the group's knowledge both of the need for change and of what needed to be changed had not been coalesced into action.

Nonetheless, the "core" group maintained that the people who most knew what was wrong with the school were also the only people who could successfully effect change in the school -- the teachers. Inherent in this belief was the requirement that the teachers, themselves, would have to change. In spite of the school's desparate condition, the "core" group was able to persuade over ninety percent of the returning faculty to make a nominal commitment to an extensive school improvement project.

The principal had worked in the district for twenty-nine years and had been in his current position for thirteen years. He occupied most of his time with monitoring the physical plant, reviewing the financial records maintained by the school's bookkeeper, and handling discipline referrals. The faculty generally perceived him as professionally supportive but somewhat distant personally. During the years since the school became a middle school, he had delegated to the assistant principal the responsibilities of supervising the instructional program and of providing for professional support and staff development. Initially somewhat reluctant to commit to such an intensive staff development program, he acquiesced to and participated in the training required of administrators prior to beginning the implementation of the program. During the implementation year, he supported the program primarily by delegating the responsibility for overseeing the project to the assistant

principal. His commitment to the on-going project reflected the organizational framework he had established at the school.

After having been promoted from among the faculty, I was beginning my second year as assistant principal. Those matters related to the instructional program and its organization, supervision, and maintenance were my responsibility. In addition, in the absence of the principal, I dealt with all discipline referrals and when the need arose, with physical plant needs. During the course of the implementation year, I assumed greater responsibility for intervening with discipline referrals in order to diffuse situations prior to their warranting suspension of the students involved. In addition to my previous duties, I had the responsibility for designing the school's implementation plan and devising and maintaining the management system used for monitoring the progress of the project in the school. I participated in all training activities, planned and presented lessons in the classroom, and designed and presented demonstration lessons to the faculty.

In making their commitment, the "core" group and other returning teachers initiated the on-site processes of change that would shift the foci of control of school improvement and professional development and for change in the school's program and environment from the external system (the district) to them as a group. According to Homans's framework, the group's commitment set into play a new "... scheme of interaction between the leaders of various levels..." and individual members of the group (Homans, 1950). In effect, interaction became not only vertical but also horizontal, and the stage was set for broadening the communication/interaction patterns among the group, the administrators of the school, and the district leadership.

The External System

To consider all components of the school's external system, which according to Homans's framework includes everything which is not part of the internal system (Homans, 1950), is difficult in a short paper. Here we will concentrate on the external system as the school district and its attendant policies and procedures.

The School District

The school district supported many initiatives aimed at improving the education of those students considered academically unable, culturally/economically deprived, and/or socially mal-adjusted. Since most of these programs were primarily of pro forma administration, the group did not view them as part of the school's program and, at times, considered them infringements on the school's instructional territory. Thus school improvement initiatives, which the faculty generally perceived as being imposed from outside the school, were thought of as not germane to the school's specific needs. As in the case of many such programs, these often were added to rather than integrated with the instructional program of the school.

The formal organization of the group was imposed primarily by the organizational patterns and operational policies of the school district. According to the district's middle school program, the group was organized in teams or subgroups. The leadership team included the principal, the assistant principal, and the designated team leaders of the other subgroups. There were thirteen other subgroups: one support team; seven interdisciplinary, academic teams; one special education team; one Chapter I team; one physical education team; one fine arts team; and one vocational team. All members of the group

were members of one or more of the subgroups. Designated team leaders communicated the subgroups' needs and concerns to the administration.

In this organizational pattern, communication or the "scheme of interaction" followed the "...characteristic pyramidal, or hierarchial, form" with the principal positioned at the "...apex of the pyramid, working with a small group of lesser leaders; each lesser leader ... [working] with his own small group ... " of teachers (Homans, 1950). Hence, the external system, the district, was common to many departmentalized organizations and supported the norm of teacher isolation by inhibiting "lateral" or horizontal interaction.

The Internal System

The internal system was governed by this external system of subgroups. Within the social system, interaction and sentiment were directly influenced by assignment to one of the subgroups. The social system supported the pre-treatment, normative patterns of the group and corresponded to the social systems which have evolved as a result of the organizational structure of most schools. Fullan (1982) stated that "The cellular organization of schools means that teachers struggle with their problems and anxieties privately, spending most of their time physically apart from their colleagues." Because of this "cellular organization," the group was "...not accustomed to taking responsibility for the school as a whole" (Joyce, Herish, & McKibben, 1983).

Prior to treatment, the appointed team leaders of the respective instructional teams served as the primary communications link between the administration and the teachers. They presided over the teams' meetings during which information about administrative and instructional matters was discussed. According to the district's middle school program, the

Instructional teams were supposed to meet regularly (for at least two and one half hours per week) to discuss the administrative needs of the school, the administrative needs of the individual teams, and the instructional needs of individual children or classes; to conduct parent-teacher/student-teacher conferences; and to engage in joint planning for the instruction of the children whom the team served. While some of the teams did, to varying degrees, function toward these purposes; this was, in reality, not the pervasive practice. In theory, the concept of interdisciplinary, instructional teams eliminated departmentalization in the middle school; in reality, it merely changed the format for forming departments from that of common subject to that of common client.

An instructional team did, however, serve to govern the social behavior of its members. Teachers were limited to interacting with team members because in accordance with the district's middle school program, they shared a common planning time, and as much as possible, the grade levels were structurally segregated. The norm of teacher isolation was thus extended to the instructional team, and most interaction was, essentially, limited to the teacher's sub-group. Homans summed "up the relationship between interaction and sentiment both in the group as a whole and in the subgroups by saying...that the more frequently persons interact with one another, the stronger their sentiments of friendship for one another are apt to be" (Homans, 1950), and reciprocally, persons who have strong sentiments of friendship for one another tend to interact more frequently with one another.

Prior to treatment, the informal social system of the school was marked by a lack of cohesion, and social rank in the school was defined primarily by membership in a clique, which Homans (1950) defined as "...a body of [people] who interact with one another more frequently than they do with outsiders."

As is typical of many American schools, the primary occasions for interacting with persons other than team members were limited essentially to general faculty meetings which, because of the nature of and dynamics of such gatherings, did not foster the development of positive sentiment as a product of cooperative problem-solving. Faculty meetings, usually held once per month, focused on the dissemination of information about district-wide concerns (meetings, policies, and procedures) and about school-wide administrative matters (schedule conflicts/changes, discipline matters, and school-wide procedures). Since these meetings convened one hour before the school day began, the agenda seldom accommodated problem solving activities or discussions.

Pursuant to the isolation of sub-groups, the pre-treatment social system provided a medium for the development of such sentiments as alienation from other staff members, inter-group hostility about the perception of a given group's relationship with the administration, subject-area elitism according suspicion to the notion of generally applicable knowledge, and egocentric, situational assessments about the processes of teaching. Teachers whom the administration publically recognized for their performances were considered the "principal's pets." Many among the staff believed that those instructional teams whose members interacted frequently with the administrators were accorded preferential treatment in regards to assignments of duties and committees, support in discipline matters, and resolution of disputes. Since most of the teachers maintained that their subject areas (i.e., math, language arts, etc.) were "the most important," they did not practice interdisciplinary planning and were little concerned with the concept that knowledge is portable. Generally, teachers rarely shared ideas, methods, or materials and virtually never observed their peers teach. Consequently,

the development of positive sentiments among the group was essentially prohibited by the lack of interaction.

Further, the group's beliefs (sentiments) about the capabilities of their students were greatly affected by the rather bleak, environmental picture which was described earlier. Essentially, this position combined genetic determinism with early-rearing determinism. Thus, they had convenient but convoluted explanations for the desparate academic situation of their students. Social disruption was explained in terms of academic ability; consequently, the prevasive sentiment was that the students of the school were not capable of increasing their intellectual skills and that they were environmentally predisposed to being socially disruptive. Socially disruptive students were not considered to be academically inclined or promising; hence, the group tended to focus its instructional energies (interactions and activities) on those students who conformed to the group's perception of acceptable classroom behaviors. To control discipline problems (both minor and serious infractions) which occurred both in and out of the classroom, some members of the group relied heavily on referring students to the administration. These teachers considered the administration to be unsupportive of them when students whom they had referred for rule infractions were not suspended from school.

With regards to mutual dependence of interaction, sentiment, and activity, Homans stated that ". . . persons who interact with one another frequently are more like one another in their activities than they are like other persons with whom they interact less frequently" (Homans, 1950). Instructional teams (sub-groups) whose students more frequently passed their courses were composed of teachers who held positive sentiments about both their students and their co-workers, engaged in interdisciplinary planning of

academic lessons, and participated in team activities with their students. These sub-groups met more often with parents about academic matters than about disciplinary concerns, sent fewer discipline referrals to the administrators, and volunteered for more extra-curricular responsibilities than did those sub-groups who held negative sentiments for the school, their students, other staff, or the middle school concept. Hence, Homans's hypotheses that interaction and sentiment are mutually dependent and that ". . . the activities of a subgroup may become increasingly differentiated from those of other subgroups up to some limit imposed by the controls of the larger group to which all the subgroups belong" were reflected in the pre-treatment condition of the internal system of the group (Homans, 1950).

Prior to treatment, the group was in a state of social disintegration which Homans described as being caused by "...a decrease in the frequency of interaction...[which brings] about a decrease in the strength of interpersonal sentiments" (Homans, 1950). The extreme level of isolation had exacerbated the anxiety about the lack of success and had intensified the disconnection from the common purpose of the school. With the onset of treatment, the group was forced to confront these counterproductive normative patterns and to begin the process of restructuring the social system.

Implementation of Treatment

I hypothesized that during the implementation of the "Models of Teaching Program," school improvement would emerge through a process of changes in the internal system of the group and that the changes in the social system would impact positively on the workplace of the group and on the climate of the school. Because the elements of social behavior are considered mutually dependent (Homans, 1950), I chose not to deal with each separately but rather

chose to observe and to report in such a way that this mutual dependence would be reflected. The concern of this case study was to chronicle how or if the institutionalization of collegial study groups impacted the social system of the group and how or if the process of restructuring the instructional program by means of increasing teaching repertoires affected the workplace and the teaching/learning climate.

The implementation plan for the treatment program employed the establishment of study groups (collegial teams) as a vehicle of school improvement (Joyce & Shovers, 1988). The dual purposes of study groups were to engage in the on-going study of instructional practices/strategies and to institutionalize the practice of peer coaching. All members of the group were assigned to one of the study groups. These collegial teams were constructed so that sub-groups (instructional teams, etc.) and cliques were not replicated, thereby, broadening the field of social interaction. By forming the collegial teams in this manner, the administration set the stage for changing what were the two most pervasive social norms of the group: (1.) teachers were isolated from each other and from the administration; and (2.) interaction was governed by membership in an instructional sub-group.

Since the idea of achieving instructional improvement through the changing of normative patterns was in itself a violation of the norms of the existing internal system, implementation was not met with universal approval by the teachers many of whom initially viewed the program as belonging wholly to the administration. The group's generally held belief was that this project, like so many others before it, would simply go away. The existing internal system's norm of isolation fueled the group's resistance to participation in study groups and peer coaching. Resistance to the program was best summarized by a teacher who stated: "If I ain't broke, don't fix me."

Most of the group considered themselves to be good teachers; however, they had remarkably little information on which to base the perceptions of their instructional skills which were in large part supported only by results of the administration's planned, annual observation for performance evaluation. However, their self-assessments were devoid of input founded in peer observation, non-evaluative administrative observation, and peer/administrative feedback. Within the group no distinctions were made among the processes of instructional supervision, administrative observation, and performance evaluation; furthermore, their perceptions of each were equally negative.

As an extension of the summer training, the group was asked to practice the new strategies during the interim between the training sessions and the beginning of the school year (six weeks). Each member of the group was assigned to a collegial team (study group), and group leaders were designated. The study groups were charged with the tasks of monitoring their practices and of insuring that each member participated according to the training expectations [e.g., each person would plan and teach nine lessons (three per teaching model with appropriate cooperative learning sets) and would observe/participate in the lessons taught by the other five study group members (approximately forty-five lessons)]. These study group practice sessions were designed to provide both increased comfort with the strategies and increased interaction among the group. When the school year began, the collegial teams were restructured to build in peer observation time (cost-free release time) and to maximize sub-group diversity. Since funding for release time was not available, cost-free, release time was generated by utilizing planning periods and on-site resource persons (the administrators, the counselor, and the media specialist). Because the group had developed

sentiments among the members of their study groups during the summer practice activities, they continued to interact, albeit less frequently, with members of those study groups; as a result, restructuring the study groups increased the field of potential interaction again.

Initially, study group leaders (essentially, group recorders) were designated by the administration; however, the true instructional leaders of the groups emerged during the course of the first six weeks of school confirming Homans's assertion that "...a group tends to create its own leaders..." (Homans, 1950). As these instructional leaders became the study groups' leaders, the groups established interaction patterns and communication patterns. These new study group leaders began to communicate the needs, concerns, and successes of their study groups to the administration. This again extended the fields of both vertical and horizontal interaction.

Each study group was composed of six members who worked together in coaching partnerships. The composition of the study groups reflected each of the three grade levels (6th, 7th, and 8th), a variety of subject areas and specialty fields (support staff, special education staff, etc.), and teachers new to the school. During collegial meetings, the study groups developed and demonstrated lessons and critiqued taped lessons. They examined the curriculum in order to determine which instructional models were appropriate delivery systems for various subject area concepts. They determined coaching partnerships and the frequency of peer observations, and the coaching pairs observed each other using the newly learned teaching models in their respective classrooms.

Initially, the group found these observations very uncomfortable. Most of this discomfort could be attributed to one or more of several factors: (1.) most significantly, their belief that being observed by or observing

another adult violated the norm of isolation; (2.) observation was definitionally linked to performance evaluation; (3.) they felt that they were putting themselves at risk when practicing the new strategies with their students because they did not, as yet, believe that the students could learn to function within the framework of the models; (4.) they were having to confront the issue of their own competence; and (5.) many of the group believed, contrary to the program's goal of improving instructional skills by expanding teaching repertoires, that the intent was to eliminate the strategies which they had heretofore been using. While other misconceptions surely contributed to the levels of discomfort, the above factors were most universally evident. Since these factors represented the program's "...departure from regularity...", they were also the primary contributors to the levels of resistance (Homans, 1950). As resistance was inexorably linked to the degree of discomfort a teacher or a group experienced while implementing the use of the new strategies in the classroom and to the pre-treatment lack of interaction among members of the study groups, the frequency of practicing the new strategies and of participating in the peer coaching process was proportionally related to the duration of discomfort. In short, members of the group who had used the strategies frequently enough to be comfortable with them were less resistant to the changes taking place in the social system.

As part of the implementation plan, the administration set aside time during the regular work week for study groups to meet. Having a scheduled time for working in the collegial study groups facilitated the process of teaching the group to work together cooperatively and of institutionalizing collaborative planning. The administration also provided the framework for familiarizing the students with the new strategies by requesting that all

teachers use one of the models in teaching each class during the first five days of school. By the end of the first week of the instructional year, the teachers had practiced one or more of the strategies from fifteen to twenty-five times (depending on their individual schedules), and the students had learned both the vocabulary and the framework of the four models [Concept Attainment, Cooperative Learning, Inductive Thinking, and Memory Assists (Joyce & Weil, 1986)] which the teachers had learned during the summer. Thus immersing all of the students communicated to both the students and the faculty that the change process was to be a shared experience in which all would be required to participate actively.

During this week, the group encountered the students' resistance to normative changes. The nature of student resistance was a corollary to that of the teachers. Having been socialized during their elementary school years to the academic drudgery of lecture/recitation/"seatwork," the students, as did their teachers, had to be taught to work together. However, their resistance to the changes was short-lived. They very quickly learned the new social skills required for cooperative activities and discovered that the new strategies provided them with increased opportunities for active participation in their own education. They began to enjoy school; they became less disruptive (both in and out of class); and they began to experience academic success.

They were not only learning more, but they were also discovering that school was not boring drudgery and that interacting with their classmates during cooperative activities ("talking in class") was an acceptable human behavior. Their decreased resistance to participation in cooperative learning activities and their acquisition of new social skills reflected Homans's assertion that "All sentiment seeks expression in action, and if the action is

rewarding it will be repeated" (Homans, 1950). Hence, as the students became accustomed to and developed an appetite for the "new way of learning," they were no longer willing to accept the bland, academic menu being offered in classes where the teachers either used the models infrequently or not at all, and in those classes, some students experienced adjustment difficulties. The students' sometimes inappropriate protestations to the "old way of learning" had the rather interesting effect of forcing the group members who had lower frequencies of implementation to increase their use of the new strategies.

When teachers increased the frequency of using a variety of instructional models and when the students began to demonstrate new learning skills and to experience success, the group reported a decrease in disruptive behavior (During the second semester of 1987-1988, the treatment year, only 36 students were suspended from school.). The decrease in disruptive behavior had the combined effects of reducing the number of disciplinary referrals and of increasing the amount of "real" instructional time. By the end of the first grading period (six weeks), the group had become aware that their pre-treatment assessments of the students' capabilities were inaccurate. Their low or in some cases, unrealistically high expectations had, in fact, contributed to their students' pre-treatment lack of success.

As teachers began to observe their students working together, they discovered that some of the students who had previously been labeled as discipline problems were energetically involved in group activities rather than engaging in "disruptive" behaviors. Other teachers observed that students whom they had perceived as "good" students were no more or less intelligent than their more boisterous cohorts. From such experiences, teachers learned the difference between productive sound and racket. Acting on this revelation, teachers began to manipulate the learning environment and

activities in ways which addressed the very human need to talk and to move. Thus teachers effectively began to control student behavior through instructional techniques rather than through quasi-legal means.

Collegial activity in and among study groups increased when the group began reporting student successes. Coaching partners were not content merely to hear about what the students were learning; they wanted to see how the students were being taught. As the frequency of peer observations increased, the group's perception of the purpose of observing changed. They soon discovered that peer observation provided them with opportunities to learn from each other. Observation no longer bore the threatening connotation of evaluation, and resistance both to observing and to being observed diminished significantly (and by the end of the year had virtually disappeared). Each study group devised plans to support their colleagues who were experiencing difficulties with a strategy, to train group members who were new to the school, and to monitor each other's progress. As the study groups began to accept peer coaching as a non-threatening means of improving instruction, they began to work collaboratively (planning, developing, critiquing, reworking, and sharing lessons) and to expand their interaction schemes to include interaction with other study groups.

Through the collaborative enterprise of peer coaching, the group developed a sense of "ownership" towards the collegial groups and came to consider the treatment "their program." The increased interaction among study groups and instructional teams gave rise to a sense of "common cause" in the group which, in conjunction with the group's emerging "ownership" of the program, had the combined effects of lowering levels of resistance and of increasing usage of the strategies.

As the group demonstrated more control of and became more comfortable with the new strategies, the group's progression toward commitment to the idea of improving instruction through increasing teaching repertoires reflected the Miles-Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 1984) thesis that commitment follows, rather than precedes competence. Simply stated, resistance was decreased through increased practice and collegial support. As resistance decreased, comfort increased. The higher frequency of practice resulted in increased competence with the use of the models. As a result of their increased commitment, the group began to explore alternative ways to deal with a variety of the environmental problems long-held to negatively affect their students' academic performance. Through competence (and "ownership"), commitment to the goal of improving the instructional skills of the group, the academic skills of the students, the workplace of both the group and the students, and the social climate of the school began to be realized.

At the end of the implementation year, the group reported some significant, if not dramatic, changes. Promotion based on merit had been increased from 34% (189 students) the previous year to 72% (400 students). The number of students who were promoted with exception to the promotion policy had been reduced from 33% (183 students) to 12% (69 students). The number of students retained was reduced from 32% (178 students) for 1986-1987 to 15% (85 students) for 1987-1988. Suspensions from school had been reduced from 343 for the previous year to 124 for the 1987-1988 school year. The norm of teacher isolation had been replaced by the new norm of the collegial study group. The social system had been restructured with broadened fields of interaction. The sentiments of both the group and their students had become more positive.

Every human group has a complex of typical behaviors or standardized social characteristics called "culture." Every culture is characterized by a patterned series of interrelationships existing among/between individuals known as a "social system." According to Homans's framework, American schools, which have informal social systems marked by little cohesion, exist in a state characterized " ...by the small number of activities in which individuals collaborate, by the low degree of contact [interaction] between individuals, and by a lack of control by the group..." which he referred to as "social disintegration" (Homans, 1950). Homans (1950) stated that the "...isolated person is sick" and "To escape isolation, a person must...become a member of a group." The institutionalization of the collegial study group has effectively eliminated isolation as the group's primary social norm. The group has developed a sense of "common cause" for achieving the school's goals, the belief that all children can learn, and a desire to succeed as a group. Through the collaborative activity of collegial teams, we have begun the process of restructuring the culture of the middle school. According to Homans, this process, called "social intergration" (Homans, 1950), is marked by increased interaction which gives rise to positive sentiment expressed in extended activities.

The changes which took place during the implementation year were small victories in the on-going battle to restructure the normative patterns which, over the course of two hundred years, have come to be so deeply entrenched in the social system of today's schools and which shape the educational opportunities of today's students. Nonetheless, the efforts of this faculty to overcome their own resistance to change, to develop their individual levels of instructional competence, and to improve the educational opportunities

proved that school improvement is a process which emerges through collegial commitment and collaborative problem-solving.

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